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ABSTRACT

The exploration of nonverbal forms of culture and communication has led to the development of visual anthropology courses within the anthropology department at Temple University. Visual anthropology is conceptualized as the study of human nonlinguistic forms of communication involving film making for data collecting and analysis. Several areas of research are suggested which include studies of human interpersonal behavior such as greeting, interviewing, and teaching; macro-units of human behavior such as rituals, ceremonies, artistic processes, socialization practices, subsistence patterns, and warfare; and films themselves as societies increasingly begin to produce their own sets of mass mediated messages for culture and communication. Courses are set up for three levels starting at the beginning undergraduate, undergraduate major, and graduate level. At the undergraduate and beginning graduate level emphasis is placed on studying cultures and communications in their verbal and nonverbal forms. Appropriate methodologies and film production techniques for research and fieldwork are emphasized for the advanced graduate student. Special emphasis is placed on the fact that a department does not need a large budget and expensive equipment to start developing courses in visual anthropology. (DE)

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THE TEACHING OF VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY AT TEMPLE

Jay Ruby and Richard Chalfen

(A paper presented at the 1973 American Anthropological Association Meetings, New Orleans,

The teaching of visual anthropology at Temple University has two larger contexts which, to some degree, define and give a specific focus to the training. The first is a departmental philosophy of graduate education and the second is the fact that this training occurs within a program of graduate studies in culture and communication (Other graduate program emphases include urban anthropology and bio-cultural adaptation.)

Graduate education in anthropology at Temple is based on the traditional assumption that anthropologists should have a foundation in all areas of their discipline. Students are required to pass comprehensive examinations in linguistics, archaeology, cultural and physical anthropology. Only after successful completion of these exams are students encouraged to specialize. Students with an interest in visual communication pursue their speciality within the broader context of the culture and communication program.

The program is designed to train students of anthropology who wish to study various modes of communication in a cultural context. The basic assumption underlying the program is that all communicative, interactive, and expressive forms of behavior are legitimate subjects of anthropological inquiry.

Our approach to culture and communication proceeds from a particular view of both culture and communication. Culture is seen as a symbolic system which is generated by a set of rules shared by members of a society. These symbols are socially defined and hence, communicative in nature and function. Furthermore, the symbols can only be analyzed when both their underlying (generating) rules

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and their social contexts are considered.

Since communication is viewed as the use of codes (i. e., culturally defined patterns of symbolic behavior) in a social context, the analysis of communication systems and events suggests itself as a logical approach to explicating both the underlying rules of culture and the social contexts of symbolic behavior.

This perspective, coupled with a view of communicative behavior as the result of simultaneous physiological and cultural operations, provides a framework for approaching a number of questions important to anthropology.

It should be emphasized that our commitment to the study of the ways people communicate in living situations and our interest in developing communication models for anthropological studies involves us in two separate though related enterprises. The first leads us to examine all the various modes of communication within single cultures and across cultures, and requires us to understand verbal and visual communication in social contexts. The second leads us to see cultural systems as sets of rules that permit the exchange of symbols. Substantively, the first enterprise leads us to study areas such as linguistics, vidistics, dance and ritual, while the second requires that we think of all culture as some kind of integrated set of circuits for the exchange of messages.

In dealing with the concerns outlined above, and making use of the resources available in our department, several major foci have evolved in the culture and communication program. They are:

1. the construction of models based on the analogy between cultural and communication systems, so that one can examine communication systems as culture and cultural systems as communication.

2. the consideration of methodological problems involved in the construction of these models.

3. the understanding of the nature, functions, and contexts of language as well as the adaptation and application of linguistic analysis (particularly socio-linguistics) to other modes of communication.

4. The study of religion and ritual is considered relevant to students of culture and communication since both are analyzed as sets of rules for the exchanges of messages as well as sets of messages worthy of study in and of themselves.

5. The exploration of non-verbal forms of communication, especially visual media.

The remainder of the paper will discuss the teaching of visual anthropology within this program.

We should initially state an obvious point: Visual anthropology has been intimately tied to the production of still and motion pictures as visual ethnographies of exotic cultures. Without neglecting the importance of this work and the many valuable contributions to date, it is our feeling that visual anthropology is much more.

Visual anthropology should be conceptualized broadly enough to include; (1) the study of human non-linguistic forms of communication which typically involves some visual technology for data collecting and analysis, (2) the study of visual products, such as films, as communicative activity and as a datum of culture amenable to ethnographic analysis, and (3) the use of visual media for the presentation of data and research findings - data and findings that otherwise remain verbally unrealized.

It should be understood that all areas of visual anthropology do not necessarily require the use of visual technology. However, most analyses are seriously handicapped without some mechanical means of replay for slow motion and repeated viewings. Hence, data are typically gathered with the aid of some visual mechanical

devise such as a camera.

While recognizing the importance of technology for visual anthropology, we regard the acquisition of competence in film production as a technical skill which some students may need to acquire in order to pursue their research and teaching goals. As a technical skill, film production is viewed like other skills such as statistics, a field language, or contour map making - they are simply tools which have potential utility provided a research design calls for them. We realize that a basic understanding of film theory, construction and filmic conventions are necessary for an understanding of film as a communicative medium. We think of the film medium in terms of its limitations, advantages, functions, what it can and cannot be expected to accomplish and where the use of film is an indispensible aide to specific research interests. The general question that must be repeatedly asked is, what have you gained after using a visual medium that you would not have gained without it?

Significant scientific research problems for an anthropologist do not consist of how to get a better sound track, why a particular tripod does not swivel in the Arctic, or what is the best distribution company for my film. These technical questions become relevant after research has been designed which demands a methodological approach involving visual technology.

Let us now mention several types of problems in visual anthropology that are intimately tied to the use of film.

(1) Micro-analytic studies of human interpersonal behaviors, such as kinesics, proxemics and tacesics are generally aided by some form of visual evidence. In courses given in our department, students have examined behavioral events such as greeting, interviewing, teaching, eating, and pan-handling. In these cases, the

camera and repeated projections act as extensions of the researcher's perceptual ability.

(2) Visual technology may also be used in the study of macro-units of human behavior. Reference here is made to the production of motion picture footage of particular rituals, ceremonies, technological and/or artistic processes, socialization practices, subsistence patterns, warfare, etc. in this context, any visual manifestation of a culture is relevant subject matter.

(3) In addition, the visual products of both professional and non-professional camera-use can be studied as cultural artifacts. Images here are treated as data of a particular culture. This interest becomes more important to anthropology as an increased number of societies begin to produce their own sets of mass mediated messages. Research interests may necessitate the use of content analysis for the study of themes, plots, or the construction of realities in media drama - work that was originally stimulated by Mead and Metraux's The Study of Culture at a Distance. As more societies begin using the technology of mass media, the entire process of visual communication may be studied as a culturally structured stream of expressive and symbolic activity. This emphasis must include behavioral observations of the process, the artifacts per se, and the audiences for specific productions. This perspective may apply to the creation and reception of a photograph, a film, a television program as well as to the creation of an art object, the study of dance, and other folkloric performances.

(4) A final problem is the dissemination of research findings, i. e., in developing the most effective strategy for using film or other visual forms to present anthropological statements. This problem encompasses not only the types of research mentioned above but potentially all phases of anthropological inquiry. Here we wish students to explore film as a communication system in order to discover

whether a set of filmic conventions can be developed which are somehow uniquely suited for the display of anthropological concepts.

With this theoretical framework in mind, let us now outline our curriculum. Students interested in visual anthropology may enter the program at three different levels - as a beginning undergraduate, as an undergraduate major, and as a graduate student. For beginning undergraduate we offer a course titled, "Images of Man: A Communications Approach to Culture." The course attempts to introduce the major concepts of cultural anthropology by examining one particular culture - usually the Eskimo - through different communicative forms. Students examine written ethnographies, novels, journals, ethnographic and documentary films, Hollywood produced fictional films, sculpture, printmaking, and music. Emphasis is placed on (i) understanding culture as communication and (ii) how the image of one culture and the human condition in general may be variably represented and partially determined by different modes of communication. Students are required to examine their own culture using various verbal and visual modes so that they will gain a personal understanding of culture and communication.

For undergraduate majors in anthropology we offer a semester course entitled "An Introduction to Culture and Communication." Here we compare systems and patterns of communicative behavior across codes, across behavioral settings, and across cultures, and expose students to communication models from linguistics, social psychology, semiotics, information theory, cybernetics, etc. A similar introductory graduate seminar is available. This course covers essentially the same material as the undergraduate course but in greater depth and intensity.

The second group of courses were designed as seminars for undergraduate seniors and beginning graduate students. They concentrate on a particular communicative mode. These offerings draw upon a general framework presented in the

introductory courses, and offer examinations in specific areas. For instance, we offer courses in linguistics and sociolinguistics which are generally structured around the paradigm established for doing ethnographies of speaking. In this group, we also offer courses in visual anthropology which concentrate on such topics as anthropological film, vidistics and specific codes of non-verbal communication.

The non-verbal courses are presented in the context of interactional and communicational anthropology and examine visual perception, ethology, body movement, the symbolic uses of space from microlevels of dyadic interaction to architecture, design, and the planning of cities and whole cultures.

In the Vidistics course students explore culturally structured patterns of encoding and decoding behavior and associated visual products that are necessarily involved in the process of visual communication. Here students are introduced to such research as Worth and Adair's Navaho project, comparisons of films made by both anthropologists and the people they study, films made by subcultures all living within the same urban settings, and the ethnographic study of communities of movie-makers such as Hollywood and homemovie productions.

Training in the production of visual materials is indispensible to any student of a culture's visual products. The content and meaning of such products cannot be properly considered without an understanding of the contextual scheme of production that necessarily surrounds that product.

The Anthropological Film course deals with a history of documentary and anthropological film styles, film theory and asethetics and offers an introduction to the problems of production. The course emphasizes the development of a scientific approach to filmmaking and of the construction of filmic conventions useful to a visual anthropologist.

Our third category of courses emphasizes the development of appropriate methodologies for research and fieldwork in visual anthropology. For instance, one course titled "Methods in the Ethnography of Communication" starts with work in sociolinguistics and explores paralled directions in non-verbal codes. In another methods course, we survey a broad array of relevant literature in such areas as cultural anthropology, folklore, sociology, research photography, content analysis, social psychology etc. to find appropriate strategies for anthropologically oriented research in cross-cultural visual communication, photojournalism, anthropological film, the homemode of visual communication, and biodocumentary filmmaking - just to mention a few research interests that have been examined.

The fourth category consists of advanced graduate seminars - designed primarily for doctoral students. These seminars are structured around a specific research problem such as "The Use of Content Analysis in the Cultural Analysis of Visual Form" or "The Examination of Open Spaces as Symbols of a Community", or "Advanced Problems in Vidistic Research" to name a few.

Our program has evolved over the past seven years from one faculty member teaching one seminar in visual anthropology to three faculty members teaching 25 courses in culture and communication, eight of which are directly concerned with visual anthropology.

This fall the anthropology department moved into a new building which provides us with a teaching and two research labs. These facilities are equipped with darkrooms, screening facilities and an array of still, 16mm, Super-8mm and VTR equipment for production and analysis uses.

We are fortunate in having these facilities and equipment. However, we feel that it is necessary to emphasize the fact that we developed this program without all of the elaborate and expensive technology that we only recently acquired. There

is a feeling that any work in visual anthropology will be financially handicapped, and that the cost for equipment and facilities has held back the development of the field in general. In some ways, this is similar to saying that someone cannot become a cultural anthropologist because they cannot afford an electric typewriter.

For the first six years of our program we spent less than $1000 on equipment. If a program in visual anthropology is primarily concerned with training scholars and scientists and not technicians, then it is quite possible to institute such a program with a small enough budget to be within the means of most departments of anthropology. Thus, from our perspective, if one factor must be named as a retarding agent in visual anthropology, we feel the blame lies with a general failure to develop the theoretical concerns rather than the limitations imposed by the cost factor.

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CONCLUSIONS

There are some obvious consequences to our program. Being anthropologists we are primarily concerned with developing a rigorously anthropological approach to the study of visual communication. We are not training people who will become exclusively anthropological filmmakers, or dance ethnologists, or non-verbal specialists or even sociolinguists. Rather we are in the business of producing anthropologists who will be able to integrate their interest in a particular communicative mode into a broad spectrum of a communication approach to anthropology. We are more concerned with training anthropologists whose primary interest is in developing a visual approach to the anthropological study of man than in producing anthropologists who occasionally collaborate with professional filmmakers to produce educational documentaries as an adjunct to their own research.

We feel that this approach is necessary in light of the traditional neglect of non-linguistic communication forms by anthropologists and the corresponding tendency of anthropologists interested in this field to become peripheral to their own discipline. Our knowledge of man as a multi-modal communicator is slight. We lack an understanding of the relationship between various codes, and in some instances the nature of the codes themselves. We feel that anthropology because of its unique holistic view of man is in a critical position to provide an opportunity to study human communicative behavior as an integrated whole.

(To appear in the Society For the Anthropology of Visual Communication Newsletter, Spring, 1974.)